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READING INSTRUCTION IN THE 1970'S FOR MEGALOPOLIS OR CENTER CITY.

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THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS IN THE MOBILE SUBURBS (THE MEGALOPOLIS) ARE AS SERIOUS IN MAGNITUDE AND TOTAL EFFECT AS THOSE OF THE MUCH PUBLICIZED CENTER CITY. BECAUSE OF THE MOBILITY AND THE HETEROGENIETY OF THESE AREAS, MANY STUDENTS RECEIVE INADEQUATE EDUCATION AND ENTER SOCIETY AS SEMILITERATES. AN ANALYSIS OF CENTERVILLE, A TYPICAL MAGALOPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT, REVEALED THAT CHILDREN LACKING IN BASIC SKILLS OFTEN ENTERED NEW SCHOOLS. THE SUCCESS OF REMEDIAL WORK VARIED WIDELY, AND, FREQUENTLY, SOCIAL, BEHAVIORAL, AND ACADEMIC PROBLEMS RESULTED. MARKED BY TRANSIENCY, INADEQUATE READING, EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, MANY STUDENTS BECAME DROPOUTS. THE MEGALOPOLITAN DROPOUT RATE OFTEN EQUALED THAT OF CENTER CITIES. A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM EMPHASIZES A JUNIOR HIGH PROGRAM TO DEVELOP LITERACY AND PROPOSES MAJOR EXPENDITURES AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL TO ACHIEVE A TEACHER-PUPIL RATIO CONDUCIVE TO INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (BOSTON, APRIL 24-27, 1968). (BS)

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Reading Instruction in the 1970's for Megalopolis or Center City

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During the past ten years we have witnessed a remarkable development of interest in the educational problems of the Center City. While teachers in Center City schools did not need to be told that the decay of the city had had a devastating effect on the schools in which they taught, apparently the rest of the greater community hadn't any awareness of the conditions which existed in our ghetto schools.

Popular novels developing the theme of blackboard jungle were forerunners of the more obscure sociological treatises dealing with the Center City schools. Such books as Dark Ghetto, Education in Depressed Areas, The Inner-City Classroom - Teacher Behavior, just to mention a few, focussed attention on the plight of an abandoned population of school children taught in rat-infested schools, located in dangerous and neglected neighborhoods.

At the present time the focus of American educational attention is on the Center City. Whether or not the present efforts will result in better education is problematical. School populations have been mixed by bussing to prevent further segregation of the poor. Ungraded primary classes and team teaching have provided new approaches to the grouping and teaching of children. Textbooks have been designed emphasizing the racial, social, economic and educational status of the learner. Efforts have been made to rid the ghetto schools of the WASP influences by integrating textbook characters, honoring minority groups in the social studies and recognizing the learning disadvantages of the poor. Attention has been focussed on intervention programs for the very young slum dweller

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and on the upgrading of education of his parents. Programs of work-school have been developed for the teen-aged dropout of Center City poor families. The great percentage of Head Start programs and the special educational efforts made possible under Title I of the ESEA have been developed for the poor children of the Center City.

Now all these efforts are necessary and need to be multiplied and it looks as if the recent rush of protests, violence and destruction in the Center City will not allow anyone to forget the plight of the poor city dweller. In fact America has barely begun to provide the help that is needed to equalize the educational opportunities and employment possibilities of the dwellers of our city ghettos in general and our Negro minority in particular.

However, while the Center City plight has caught the imagination of socially conscious Americans, an equally grave educational problem has been developing almost unnoticed in the great megalopolises of America. I am going to spend my brief time developing the thesis that if the U.S. is to continue its role of world leadership through a superior educational system that it must reevaluate the great suburban areas that have developed in the past 20-40 years and recognize that problems of the same or even great magnitude in terms of the education of our youth are occurring in megalopolis as exist in the Center City.

In order that we understand megalopolis, think for a moment of that vast area which stretches from Washington, D.C. to Boston. The area has been well described by Jean Gottmann in his book Megalopolis,

written for the Twentieth Century Fund. Within this megalopolitan area, known as Boswash, live more than one-third of the people of our nation. While the huge urban complexes of Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Newark, New York and Boston dominate the scene and capture most of the headlines devoted to any topic, good or bad, the bulk of the people live in between the urban centers, in villages, small cities, suburban towns, developments and in scattered pockets between every urban-like cluster.

Megalopolis is dominated by the automobile. Its population is highly mobile and its heterogeniety increases each year. The mobility in any given sector is upward, sidewards and downwards. The trend is usually from Center City, to city fringes, to the first circle of suburbia and on to the elite semi-rural estates of the new aristocracy. Each move from the Center City involves more expense and the last move outward is usually the one that breaks the economic back of the family and forces it to retreat back to the city again.

It is within this state of megalopolitan flux that the ignored schools about which I am concerned exist on monies drawn largely from taxes on single family homes. The typical community is characterized by votes on bond issues for badly needed buildings which can be defeated or passed by what seems like a cranky whim of the taxpayers; by transient school superintendents and teachers; by fleets of expensive school busses and by hordes of arrived, newly arrived and still arriving children.

Perhaps a view of Centerville, a typical district school in the megalopolis, will make graphic the plight of many. Centerville was once a crossroads hamlet of 250, located some thirty miles from the center of one of our large Boswash cities. The ugly red brick building which dominated the busy corner for many years was the community school. The school served some 100 pupils in grades K to 8. When pupils completed Centerville school they were usually bussed to the high school in Huntingville, some seven miles away. The serenity of Centerville, protected by potato farms, nurseries and duck farms was undisturbed from 1820 to 1945. From that last year of W.W. II to 1968 Centerville has been transformed in every respect. Today 25,000 people live in and around Centerville. The potato fields are covered with housing developments. The last nursery is ready to close up its greenhouses and the ducks are long since silenced.

The red brick school house is still connected with the educational enterprise as it now houses the tools and machinery of the building and grounds staff of the school. The Centerville school system, now a sprawling enterprise, spreads out over an area of thirty square miles. A large educational palace, located in the center of the district, houses some 1700 high school students. On the eastern and western extremities of the area — nine miles apart — stand two beautiful junior high schools — one crowded with 1200 pupils, the other holding 900 pupils but expecting to be at capacity, 1200, in two years or less.

Nine, 600 pupil elementary schools are scattered throughout the school district. In all, the school system houses 9200 pupils. Projections suggest that by 1975 the school population will reach 20,000

and the community, already screaming about taxes, will be asked to build nine new elementary schools, two junior high schools, a new high school, an administration building, bus garages, and begin to think about replacing or rebuilding the original, jerry-built, elementary schools erected between 1945-1955.

We can leave the problems of buildings to others. Our concern is with the educational program -- the pupils, teachers, administrators and their interactions.

Consider the location of the schools in the district for a moment. The west side of the district is nearest to the city and is bordered by a highly mobile community which is presently saturated with former city dwellers. A small area of this once glamorous suburb is now slum-like in appearance. The population of the neighboring suburb, newly arrived from the eastern side of the city is suffering from being over-extended economically and deprived because of their former socio-economic and educational status. Two of Centerville's elementary schools border on this suburb. On the northwest boundary of the district we find another elementary school. It borders on a community which, due to the fact that cheap dwellings were built to house migrant farm and nursery workers, now is a suburban ghetto. The Commissioner of Education of the State is seeking ways of closing the schools in the ghetto suburb and attaching portions of the school population to each of the more affluent neighboring suburban school districts. Our northwest corner elementary school has a gradually changing population in terms of racial,

social and economic status. Five years ago Negro children and children from poor white families began to appear in the school. Today 30 per cent of the school children are considered deprived or neglected.

As far as the other west end elementary school is concerned, it has a relatively mobile population of pupils who come mainly from the suburbs closer to the city and then move east as parents seek a higher socio-economic neighborhood. Some pupils drift into the schools from the more affluent east as their parents find that they have over-extended themselves economically and physically. Fathers of such families, moonlighting after driving thirty miles into and from jobs in the city found they couldn't keep up the pace. Mothers, forced to work found the new life an unhappy and dissatisfying one as they were made aware that the morale of their children was disintegrating from lack of parental care.

A study of one of the western schools reveals that from September 1967 to April 1968, 85 pupils of the 600 left the school, some bound east and "upward", some bound west and "downward", others transferring north or south -- with families remaining in the same socio-economic milieu. During this same period, 90 pupils had joined the school. A few had come from the city, some from the near western suburb, a few from the east, and others from random schools, public and private.

Of great importance is the fact that of the 90 pupils joining the school, only 45 had accompanying records which were meaningful. The

other 45 were without records except for meaningless report cards. Teachers, the reading consultant and the psychologist of the Centerville Elementary School spent time studying each child in order to make placement for teaching as sensible as possible. An actual visit to each teacher receiving new pupils and losing others, revealed that in most instances, the teacher felt that the exchange was not in his favor. Invariably the pupils from the city and some city suburbs lacked basic skills. Pupils from the eastern suburbs often seemed upset - lacking in discipline. Of course, the teachers might exaggerate but the observer was able to visit the children who had moved in and to look at the records of those who had left. The teachers seemed to be right in their appraisal of the situation. The exchange was not often to <u>their</u> best interests.

The strategies of teaching the newcomers usually included particular attention to reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic skills.

If the teacher taught the magic three-group plan in a heterogeneous, self-contained class, the new pupils usually didn't quite fit. If the pupil was badly disoriented, and these were but a few, then pupil reaction to the newcomer could be negative. Pupils readily noted the discomfiture of teachers, often joined forces with their leader and added to the problems of the poor student.

Occasionally, of course, the teacher received a newcomer who fitted in beautifully with one of the operating groups and might even lead them. The observer met several of these very welcome additions to the classroom but they were in the minority.

Another important issue raised by the entrance of new pupils is the need to educate the parents and pupils alike to a new set of ground rules. The newcomers only need to raise a slight fuss to upset teachers and administrators alike and just when the principal and teachers were relaxing and saying that "things are settling down again."

Teachers are affected in subtle ways by even the modest mobility suggested above. After all, more than 2/3 of the pupils are steady customers but somehow the arrival and departure of 1/3 of the population seems to outweigh in almost every area the stability created by the 2/3 who remain.

There are two critical areas noted insofar as reading instruction for those entering the school is concerned. The first relates to the pupils entering the first and second grades who have not yet begun to read at the beginning levels. Often teachers are unable to cope with the newcomer. If a remedial reading teacher is available the best that can be done in most cases is the giving of a confirming diagnosis which simply indicates that the teacher was right. Johnny hasn't learned to read at the beginning level. While many teachers are successful in teaching beginning steps in reading to small groups of very young pupils, it often seems impossible for the same able teachers to pick up the child who has had an unsuccessful beginning in another first grade or has spent his time in first and part of second grade without learning what was expected of him. Teachers consulted with on this problem are themselves confused by the fact that "nothing" they can do seems to work. And this, in spite of the fact that they were successful with hundreds of others.

The second critical area relates to the middle grades and the pupil who enters the 4th or 5th grade with real deficits in his reading ability. He is not only a stranger but an unsuccessful one and the impact of this on the pupil and his peers is often drastic. Remedial help is needed if the pupil is to learn the content subjects through reading. Social Studies, Science, Arithmetic pose problems for the newcomer that even the best staffed elementary school often cannot cope with. The first superficial diagnosis of the pupil needs extension and before very long a new "problem" reader has been identified and fixed in place like a butterfly pinned to a board.

A return to the larger scene reveals that five elementary schools in our school district send their pupils to the western junior high. Three of the schools, with relatively stable populations, supply six hundred fairly able pupils -- ready to go in terms of the demand of the junior high school. The other two schools supply three hundred pupils of widely divergent abilities. In addition to having pupils of lower I.Q.'s and reading ability, both schools are identified as those supplying the "trouble-makers". The three years of junior high school compound the problems of the poor readers and emotionally disturbed from the elementary school. In spite of good remedial and corrective reading the drop-out die seems to have been cast. Some of the pupils spend a fourth year in junior high school but to little or no avail. They are merely older when they finally reach the senior high.

By the end of the 9th grade in our junior high school, some 30 per cent of the population are not prepared for the academic demands of the senior high school they will attend. Marked by their transiency, inadequate reading, emotional problems and socio-economic status, many of these pupils will leave the high school before graduation. Unless these pupils eventually learn to read with adequacy, they might well join the ranks of the semi-literate. Certainly many will not be fully employable in our modern society, dominated as it is by the need for all aspects of communication.

The Senior High School, fed by pupils from the two Junior High Schools, is able to provide a sound educational program for the majority of its pupils. In spite of rumors or claims to the contrary, it is a two-track academic school. If one talked to the principal and his advisors, one would gain the notion that any pupil entering Centerville Senior High School could receive an education which would enhance his future. Close inspection of students and program reveal that this is not true. The cluster of inadequate pupils who have come from the West Junior High School and a few from the East Junior High School fit in neither track. The academic program, of which Centerville High is proud, demands mastery of the language skills in particular for success. The non-academic program with its offerings of business subjects, home economics and industrial arts includes academic demands which are out of line with the abilities of the inadequate students coming from the Junior High School.

Of course, the High School principal and his teachers have a conscience and do their best, but this best is not good enough. The provision of a remedial reading course for the tenth grade pupils provides the administration with the feeling that they have done "something" about those poor kids from West Junior High. A few teachers try to adjust their offerings so that the inadequate readers can learn something in their courses. By the middle of the tenth grade most of the poor readers get the message. The High School is not for them. For all practical purposes their academic careers end. The students either drop out in the tenth grade or hang out on the fringes of the High School scene until they are eligible for the armed services or for a job which appeals to them. Of course, a number of other things of a less pleasant nature can happen to separate the student from the school.

The Centerville school system can count then some 10 to 20 per cent of the students who reach the 10th grade as academic casualties. These students cannot read adequately, are lacking in knowledge and cannot profit from any instruction which demands mastery over language or arithmetic skills. The school system can justify its failures on the basis of family background, socio-economic status, transiency and a variety of psychological and intellectual problems but the justification does not remove the fact that Centerville, in spite of the high cost of its educational program, has allowed a large number of individuals to slip into the main stream of American life as semi-literate, more or less unemployable, and to a certain degree, anti-social, and often maladjusted.

Centerville's problem is relatively unnoticed and certainly not publicized. Yet the Centervilles of megalopolis have probably produced a number of drop-outs equal to those produced by the much better advertised Center Cities in the same megalopolitan area.

What solution do we have for the problem? Perhaps we could suggest a re-reading of Conant's suggestions for a new design for the American High School. We might suggest a changed emphasis in academic techniques in the Junior High School -- a strategy which would focus on developing literacy above all else for those pupils who cannot read adequately.

We might also advocate a more realistic appraisal of the elementary instructional program which might lead to a more precise and on-going diagnosis and treatment of any pupil who is unable to read as well as we would predict when considering his ability. The major expenditure for instruction might be made during the primary grades so that teacher-pupil ratio is more reasonable and pupils are not allowed to progress in failure because of the inability of primary teachers to deal with large groups of pupils.

For the moment we have attempted to focus attention on the plight of the schools in the mobile suburbs of our megalopolis. We are certain that this plight is as serious in magnitude and total effect as that of the Center City and equally deserving in the attention of the nation. Unless this attention is given, the problem of the semi-literate in America will never be solved.